



Proactivity in Concert: an Interactive Perspective on Employee Proactivity
R.E. van Geffen

English Summary

With this dissertation, I aim to contribute to research on proactive behavior in organizations by investigating proactive behavior in relational work settings (i.e. work contexts where individuals work together to achieve a common goal). The demand for employee proactivity as well as the prevalence of relational work designs – employees working together closely and interdependently – are two concurrent developments in contemporary organizations (Grant & Parker, 2009). On the one hand, employees are asked to be proactive: to show self-started behaviors that are aimed at improving the work situation with a long term focus (Crant, 2000). On the other hand, the rise of team work has employees working closely together in teams, work groups or projects, with the aim of making optimal use of the knowledge, skills and abilities available in the organization (Mathieu et al., 2008). However, these two developments together mean that employees are asked to proactively shape not only their personal work situation, but also that of their peers. With this dissertation I set out to explore the consequences of these two co-occurring developments. The question that is central to this dissertation is: Can employees work together to be proactive, and work together proactively?

Chapter 1 details the state of the art of proactivity research that inspired this dissertation. In this review, I identify four important avenues for future research. First, even though many organizations nowadays organize their work in teams (Grant & Parker, 2009; Harris & Kirkman, 2016; Mathieu et al., 2008), the research on proactivity in this context is limited. What is still missing in existing research, is a focus on the way team members interact in teams, in relation to employee proactivity. This presents a caveat as interaction within the team is what should make teams more productive compared to employees working separately. As teams discuss their different viewpoints, they make better decisions and they should perform better. Whether they also become more proactive in the process is another question.

Furthermore, employee proactivity may have interpersonal consequences that have not previously been considered. Affective events theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) describes that employees could potentially have positive and reactions to coworker's proactivity. On the one hand, proactive employees

endeavor to improve the work situation (yielding positive reaction). On the other hand, they also impact the work situation of their coworkers in the process, and not necessarily in a way coworkers prefer (thus yielding negative reactions). However, proactivity research to date has focused mainly on the consequences of proactivity for the employee themselves, rather than their coworkers..

Chapter 2 presents the first of four empirical studies in this dissertation, based on the first part of the research question: Can employees work together to be proactive? In this Chapter, I aim to assess to what extent a team's discussion of the task and subsequent team reflection could help team proactivity. Teams currently operating in organizations in the Netherlands were asked to participate in an online survey in order to test the hypotheses of Chapter 2. In total, 129 teams and their manager contributed to the study. The results showed that both at the individual and the team level, perceptions of task conflict (discussion of the task) was related to team reflection, and that team reflection in turn was related to both team performance and team proactivity. This chapter showed that when team members discuss the task at hand and subsequently reflect on their work, they can be more proactive together.

Team proactivity is defined as the extent to which a group of employees is able to proactively shape their work together (Harris & Kirkman, 2016; Karoline Strauss et al., 2009). Although some team characteristics (e.g. team composition and climate) have been researched in relation to team proactivity, there has been little attention for the perception of interaction between team members in the team. However, in the team literature the notion that team members benefit from interaction by discussing their different views of the task is considered a given (De Wit et al., 2012). I therefore expected and found that team task conflict is positively related to team proactivity.

Chapter 3 moves on to look more closely at proactive behavior in the team as it occurs, and how team members feel afterwards. In order to explore the affective effects of employee proactivity in teams, Chapter 3 presents observations of employee proactivity in the work meetings of 36 teams and the affective reactions in the team. The results show that although employee proactivity tends to yield positive reactions, in terms of affect –positive emotional states- of the proactive individual and the team as a whole, there are

some negative effects as well. When employees are targeted (directly addressed and influenced by the proposed change) by another employee's idea for change, the extent to which the team climate is favorable for employee proactivity determines whether the targeted employee's reaction is positive or negative. Furthermore, when a subgroup in the team is disproportionately vocal or silent in the meeting, the collective reactions are more negative.

Scholars of proactivity in teams note that the proactive behavior taking place in teams could explain how team situational characteristics such as composition influence team outcomes (Harris & Kirkman, 2016). Furthermore, proactive behavior in the team could have affective reactions for both the proactive employee and their coworkers. For example, if one employee decides a work method needs to be improved, this requires the rest of the team to also make changes. As proactive employees shape the team's work based on their expertise and preferences, they should be more satisfied with the work situation making their proactivity a positive event for themselves. However, for coworkers, employee proactivity could be a negative event as they may feel restricted by ideas, suggestions and comments proactively shared, as those ideas impact their work situation (Bolino et al., 2016). Chapter 3 utilizes an innovative research design for this field (behavioral observation) to learn more about the second part of the research question: can employees work together proactively?

Chapter 4 combines two empirical study designs to further investigate the reactions to proactivity perceived by coworkers. In order to increase our understanding of the perceptions of voice behaviors – proactively sharing ideas for improvement - of voice targets (the coworkers affected), the first study involves a vignette study to compare reactions to promotive voice behavior to reactions to prohibitive voice behavior. Although both are positive in their intent, one (promotive voice) aims to promote a desired future state, while the other (prohibitive voice) aims to prohibit a negative future state (Liang et al., 2012). I expected promotive voice to yield positive affective reactions from targeted employees because it is positively formulated. Because prohibitive voice is positively intended, but formulated negatively, I expected the affective reactions to prohibitive voice to be twofold; positive and negative. Participants in

this vignette study responded to a described situation in which a coworker showed either promotive, prohibitive, or no voice. We found that there was no clear effect for prohibitive voice and a clearly positive effect of promotive voice as compared to no voice. In short, employees felt better after their coworker had voiced to them in a promotive way. Finally, there were some differences in responses when targeted employees are more extraverted or more neurotic (both had more positive reactions to voice).

In order to substantiate these findings, Chapter 4 presents an experience sampling study, in which employees reported on a daily basis for one week when they perceived voice from their coworkers and how they felt about what was voiced. In this second study, it was hypothesized that extraverted employees, because they have a preference for direct oral communication (Cropanzano & Dasborough, 2015; Gray, 1970), would react more positively than the average employee to promotive voice. Furthermore, we expected that more neurotic employees would also react more positively to promotive voice, due to their preference for direction from others (Judge et al., 2002; Rusting & Larsen, 1997). The results support the expectation that certain employees experience less negative affect after their coworker's voice. Specifically, more neurotic employees as well as more extraverted employees were found to experience less negative affect when targeted with promotive voice compared to when they are not targeted with promotive voice. We again found no effects for prohibitive voice (in terms of affective reactions), signaling that this type of voice behavior is not clearly positively or negatively perceived by the target. These results support that voice is a positive affective event for employees who are targeted by it, but the affective reactions differ for different employees as well as for different types of voice behavior.

Finally, in Chapter 5, the focus is on how employee and manager efficacy relate together to employee proactivity. Specifically, the extent to which both the manager feels efficacious in their leading role and the employee shows RBSE, or not, and how this influences employee voice behavior. Previous research has shown that manager efficacy – how secure managers feel in their role as leader - plays a role in the extent to which employees feel that they should voice, given that manager efficacy determines the chances of a positive reaction of the manager to employee voice (Fast et al., 2014). Furthermore, research

has shown that employees need role breadth self-efficacy in order to feel that they can succeed, which makes it worth it to take the risk of showing voice behavior as they feel they are able to make a contribution (Ohly & Fritz, 2007; Parker, 1998). In this study, we move one step further by looking at the combination of manager and employee efficacy rather than the efficacy of employees and managers separately.

In order to do so, paired employees and managers of Dutch organizations filled out online surveys on their level of efficacy and on the voice behavior of the employee. With polynomial regression analysis and subsequent surface plot analysis, a detailed picture of different configurations of managers and employees was obtained. The results showed that a match between employee and manager efficacy levels predicts higher levels of voice behavior better than a mismatch (an efficacious employee with an insecure manager or the other way around). A match always predicts more voice, even when both the leader and the employee experience low levels of self-efficacy voice is higher than when one of them is highly efficacious and the other is not. Our findings also show that employee efficacy plays a larger role in voice behavior of the employee, such that it represents a prerequisite of voice behavior. When the manager's level of efficacy matches that of the employee, predicted levels of voice increase further. Finally, additional analyses showed that this specifically applies to situations in which managers and employees do not have a strong relationship. These results show the significance of manager and employee interaction at work in stimulating proactive behavior.

The final Chapter outlines how the previous chapters relate to and advance the current literature on proactivity and relational work settings. First of all, two of the studies described above (Chapters 2 and 3) contribute to the literature on proactivity in teams by shedding light on the way team members interact (discussing the task, reflecting on past work, or proactively sharing ideas) in relation to team outcomes. However, they also point to possible negative (affective) side effects of proactivity (Bolino et al., 2016), and question whether proactivity really precedes team performance by suggesting that proactivity may be an outcome by itself next to task performance. Chapters 3 and 4 extend the knowledge on affect in relation to proactivity at work by showing that there might be long term proactive affective cycles occurring in

organizations, where the affective reactions to proactivity act as antecedent to more proactivity (see also the research on how affect inspires proactive behavior, e.g., Parker, Bindl, & Strauss, 2010; Wolsink, 2017). The mostly positive affective consequences of proactivity in a relational work setting provide another rationale for organizations to aim for a climate conducive to proactivity. As employees become more proactive, not only should organizational functioning improve, but the positive reactions of others may improve the organization at another level as well. This provides a starting point for research on why organizations as a whole should become more proactive. Chapter 5 brings an interactive perspective to the literature on leadership in relation to employee proactivity, which has so far mainly focused on leadership styles rather than the fit between leader and follower (Den Hartog & Belschak, 2016). Chapter 6 goes on to describe avenues for future research, the methodological contributions of the 5 research designs, and provides recommendations for practice based on the presented results.

In conclusion, the answer to the first part of the previously stated research question is: yes; employees can work together to be proactive, provided that they make use of their differing views and reflect structurally about their ways of working. The answer to the second part also is a yes: employees can work together proactively, with other employees as well as with their manager, as long as there is a right fit in efficacy (both manager and employee are confident of their roles) and/or personality with behavior (voice targeted at neurotic/extraverted employees). This dissertation has aimed to broaden the perspective on proactive behavior in organizations by taking into account aspects of relational work designs. Although there is more to it than simply putting employees together and waiting for the magic to happen, this dissertation clearly shows that the relational aspects of work can help employees, teams and organizations to be more proactive. People interact with each other and it is through this interaction and due to individual differences or synchrony between these people, that proactivity may wither or thrive.